

School Enrollment, 1998

Education is not just our future, it is very much a part of our daily lives with more than one in four Americans aged 3 and older — 72 million people — enrolled in school.

To determine the needs of next year's class, educators begin by looking at last year's statistics. Businesses supplying paper, pens, desks, and computers are also interested in the facts about changing school enrollment. Human resource planners look to these numbers to see where the next generation of workers will come from and how well prepared they will be.

About 8 million children were enrolled in nursery school or kindergarten and 33 million in elementary school,¹ according to the October 1998 Current Population Survey (CPS). High schools and colleges accounted for about 16 million students each.²

¹ Junior high school students are included with elementary school students for the purposes of this report.

² The estimates for high school and college enrollment were not significantly different from each other.

Words That Count

- **Regular schools** include public, parochial, and other private schools that advance a student toward an elementary or high school diploma, or a college, university, or professional school degree. Trade schools, business colleges, and schools for the mentally handicapped, which do not advance students to regular school degrees, are not included.
- **Nursery schools** are regular schools that provide educational experiences for children during the years preceding kindergarten. Private homes that provide primarily custodial care are not considered nursery schools. Children in Head Start or similar programs are counted under nursery school or kindergarten, as appropriate.

Half of 3- and 4-year-olds were enrolled in school in 1998, up from 37 percent in 1980.

Among non-Hispanics, the majority of White, Black, and Asian and Pacific Islander children aged 3 and 4 attended school in 1998.³ Forty percent of Hispanics⁴ that age were also enrolled. Since nursery school is not usually part of the public school system, costs may prevent some families from enrolling their children.

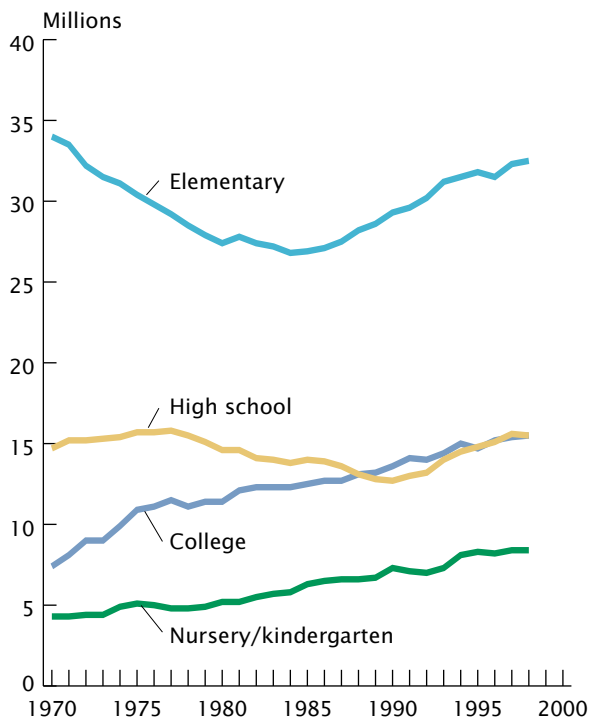
About 5 million children aged 6 and younger attended nursery school in 1998. Although children were more likely to attend nursery school when their mother was in the labor force, a substantial share of children went to nursery school even though their mother was not working or looking for work. Sixty-four percent of nursery school students lived with a mother who was either working or looking for work and 29 percent lived

³ There is no statistical difference between the percentage of Asian and Pacific Islander non-Hispanic 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in school and the percentage for White non-Hispanics and Black non-Hispanics in this age group.

⁴ Hispanics may be of any race.

Figure 8-1.

Students by Level of School Enrollment: 1970-98



Note: The figures for 1970 and 1971 do not include students aged 35 and older.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Surveys, October 1970 to October 1998.

with a mother who was not in the labor force. The remaining children did not live with their mother.

In 1998, the vast majority of 5- and 6-year-olds (96 percent) were enrolled in school. Enrollment was high for each of the racial and ethnic groups. Among non-Hispanics in this age group, 96 percent of White children, 95 percent of Black children, and 98 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander children were enrolled.⁵ Also, 93 percent of Hispanic 5- and 6-year-olds attended school.

The number of elementary and high school students remains high.

The total number of elementary and high school students in 1998 fell just short of the all-time high of 49 million reached in 1970. During the 1970s and early 1980s, elementary and high school enrollments fell following a general decrease in the size of the 6- to 17-year-old population. More recently, enrollment has risen as the children of the large baby boom generation move through the school system.

Elementary and high school students were more racially and ethnically diverse than the population in general in 1998. Although 11 percent of people living in the United States were Hispanic, 14 percent of elementary and high school students were. And even though 13 percent of all residents were Black, 17 percent of these students were.

In 1998, the number of traditional college-age students (those under 25 years old) remained at the record high level of 9.4 million reached in 1997.

Women accounted for 56 percent of America's 16 million college students in 1998 and have been the majority since 1979. Although women were a slight majority among traditional college-age students (53 percent), they were 65 percent of students aged 35 and older.

Older students must plan their college careers around jobs and families. While part-time students made up 34 percent of all college students in 1998, they were 73 percent of students aged 35 and older.

⁵ Among non-Hispanics, there are no statistical differences in the percentages of White, Black, and Asian and Pacific Islander 5- and 6-year-olds enrolled in school.

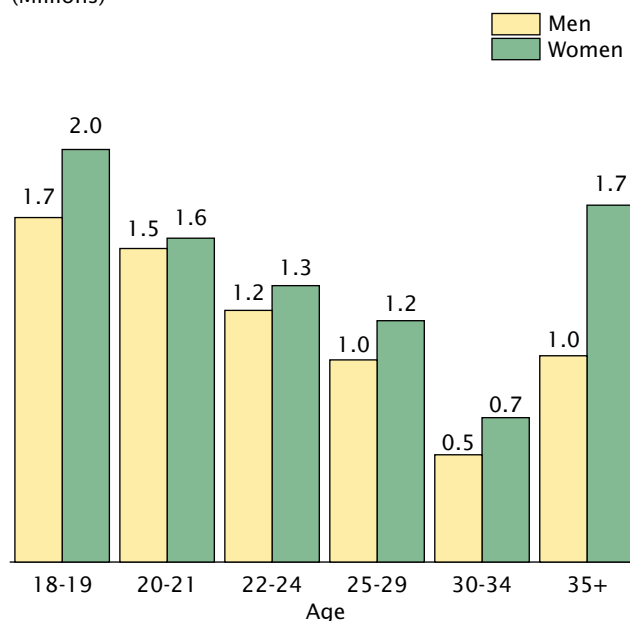
The racial and ethnic composition of college students has shifted during the last two decades. Since 1980, Hispanic enrollment has tripled — bringing their total up to 1.4 million. In 1998, Hispanics represented 9 percent of all college students. During this same time period, Black

college enrollment increased 73 percent — bringing their total up to 2.0 million and their share up to 13 percent students. In 1998, about 71 percent of college students were White non-Hispanics and 6 percent were Asian and Pacific Islanders.

Figure 8-2.

College Enrollment for Men and Women by Age: 1998

(Millions)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, October 1998.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report: *School Enrollment — Social and Economic Characteristics of Students (Update): October 1999* by Gladys M. Martinez and Andrea E. Curry.
- Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's World Wide Web site (www.census.gov). Click on "S" and select "School Enrollment."
- Contact the Education and Social Stratification Branch of the U.S. Census Bureau at 301-457-2464 or e-mail pop@census.gov.
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.